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ABSTRACT

There is a need for reading instruction at the college level because (1) no matter how much reading instruction a student has had, he or she can benefit from more; (2) it is not until college that some students realize how important reading is; and (3) many students make it to college who are still poor readers. A successful developmental reading course has been organized at the University of Wisconsin, LaCrosse, that is highly recommended by counselors, instructors, and students. The course is similar to many college reading courses in that it covers rate and comprehension development, listening, notetaking, and vocabulary improvement. Students are permitted to work individually on their personal reading level and to receive individual tutoring when needed. The course differs from other reading courses in that it uses teacher-developed texts, student attendance is required, teachers hold individual conferences with students two or three times a semester, and teachers teach in a concerned, personal manner to counteract negative experiences poor readers have had with reading instruction. Students are also responsible for several assignments that are carefully graded to give the course substance. Standardized test scores indicate that the program has been successful in improving comprehension and word rates. (HTH)

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"Positive Reading With A Personal Touch"

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Reading Problem

Case 326

Dissection begins
with testing. Each day
you take the living,
breathing parts
and measure,
count,
condense and weigh.
Results soon mount
into a kind of pattern.
Examine carefully
the motivation.
Observe
just where he sat,
with whom he played
and whether there were tears.
Analysis should always
lack emotion,
so do not let yourself
be swayed
by dreaming eyes
or closed and clouded face.
It is for his own good
that he should be
correctly categorized.
He needs
to know his place.
Remediation cannot start
until he's pigeon-holed
and labelled.

Don't question
what you do.
You aren't alone in feeling torn.
It is regrettable, but true;
the butterfly
will always die
when pinned to paper.

This poem by Patricia Edwards exemplifies what I believe is responsible for turning out many of the disenchanted readers I see every day. After teaching reading at the elementary, secondary, and adult levels I find myself still teaching reading, only now at the university level, the University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse.

When people hear that I teach reading at a university they are often astounded and say, "How is it possible that you teach reading to university students?" To that question I answer, "Because there is a need."

Why is there a need? I can think of three big reasons for this.

First - I believe that no matter how old you are and how much reading instruction you have had, you can benefit from more. It was folly to think as many people did, that once a child had completed six or eight years of instruction that he or she had reached the pinnacle and no longer needed any help in reading.

Second - It isn't until college that some students really realize how important reading is. Anyone who has ever taught in high school knows that many students see little value in reading. They are much more concerned with making money while working at Mc'Donalds, getting ready for a big date, preparing for a wrestling match, or most of all, counting the days until graduation. Then too, it is possible to get through many high school courses with little or no reading, and even those schools with competency tests often require only an eighth grade reading level. So the student graduates, decides upon college and finds that in college he needs to read better. Now the value of reading becomes apparent. Now there is a need. So we have one whole group of students in college, really pretty fair to average students, but students who don't read as well as they should.

Third - We have those students who make it to college but are really poor readers. Included in this group are the students who have been pinned to the paper as the butterfly in Patricia Edward's poem.

How can this be with our schools abounding in reading teachers, reading coordinators, reading supervisors; and reading books and materials of all kinds including tapes and records and films and slides; and techniques ranging from basal texts to alphabet variations to reading in colors, to phonics to language experience, to crawling and creeping? Schools now have bathtubs for reading in, carpets for reading on, and adults to read to. And still students get to college who can't read.

Well, let's face it. Not all teachers are good, any more than all doctors and lawyers are good. Some techniques used are poor, some students have somehow made it all the way to college with poor eyesight and other physical problems, and of course there are those who never will read well and shouldn't be in college in the first place.

Let me read what some of my college students wrote for me on an assignment that directed them to analyze their own reading situations. These statements make it easier to understand why some students feel the way they do about reading and why some students still have reading problems at the college level.

The first student describes his loss of motivation in sixth grade.

> I think the loss of motivation began, when I was in sixth grade. In sixth grade, "Reading" classes were held during recess, which was one of the distracting points. The other point was a little more complicated. During these periods we (the group of lacking readers) were left alone to fulfill the assignments on our own. Most slept, others tried, but there were also those people there like me. Those people were not sure what to do and were afraid to ask, for fear of a scolding by the teachers' aide. I sat through two years of the same type of class and never improved even though the reason I was in the class was to read faster and comprehend.

The second remembers the reading groups and the fear of reading.

> When I was in grade school we had three reading groups A, B and C. I was in the B group. None of the kids made fun of the B and C groups, but the teacher embarrassed you a lot. If you said the same word wrong about twice, she would grab you by the hair and stand you in the corner. No one liked her, not even the A group. Some of the kids were scared to come to reading class and therefore did not learn their basic reading skills. I know a few of these kids, and they are having trouble reading today. It may not be solely for that reason, but I'm sure it had something to do with it.

The third student remembers the Achievement Charts, but not very fondly.

> Another weakness of mine is I just don't enjoy reading. This is or was caused by many different teachers in many different ways. Some of them are the following:
>
> I had a teacher in second grade that made us write words every time we made a goof up in reading.
>
> I had a teacher in fourth grade who on our spelling test didn't give me time to get my paper out. She gave the test. Then we corrected the spelling to see what ones were wrong. After we corrected them, we had to write the wrong ones 100 times. I didn't start until the test was almost over, thus, I had almost all of them

> wrong. I was writing the incorrect words for about two hours. This is an instance that really turned me off to reading or writing words.
>
> Another "turn off" I had was the Achievement Charts. All of the other students were pretty good readers, so they all had quite a few stars by their names. I was a pretty slow reader and had very few stars by my name. This really frustrated me, and I feel may have kept me back with my reading ability.
>
> One more I can think of was in sixth grade. I had a teacher who believed in separate groups, good group and slow group. One day everyone in the slow group had to read in front of the class. This really terrified me and turned me off.

Now recognizing the fact that there is a need for reading instruction, even at the college level, the University of Wisconsin - LaCrosse offers a two credit elective course entitled Developmental Reading. This is where I come in. Nine or ten sections of this course are taught each semester. I teach five or six of these sections, which are invariably filled. How do we get over 200 students into this course every semester? We surveyed our classes a few times and had students check how and/or why they took the Reading class. We discovered that students wind up in the class for several reasons.

1. Professors recommend they take it.
2. Counselors recommend they take it.(B.Q.).
3. Some take it out of desperation.
4. By far the most sign up because other students recommend the course to them.

This we feel is a solid compliment for us and our course, and we feel that it is popular because we believe in teaching

reading with a positive approach and in a personal manner.

Next, I would like to describe the course in some detail. How is our reading class similar to other college type reading classes?

1. First we pre and post test our students on a standardized test, in this case the Mc'Graw - Hill. We use it because it is one of the few reading tests available with norms for college students.

2. Second we lecture on topics common in most college reading - study type courses including; rate development, comprehension, vocabulary improvement, concentration, study techniques, memory, test taking, skimming and scanning, listening, time budgeting, note taking, and critical reading.

The lectures are generally short, pertinent and followed up with connecting handouts and activities. Stress is always placed upon applying what is learned in all the student reading activities.

3. Students meet for two lecture periods a week, standard for a two credit course.

4. Students are also required to put in one period a week in our reading lab where they work individually on their personal reading situations.

5. Students get individual tutoring if they score especially low on the standardized reading test.

None of these things is that earth-shaking, but we feel that they are important enough and productive enough to retain as the bases of our program.

Now, how is our course different from others of this nature? We feel we are unique in several ways.

1. We have developed our own texts in vocabulary development and skimming and scanning and feel that they more closely fill our needs than other commercially prepared texts. We have our students think about words in several ways and have them learn words that are useful and common, especially in a college setting. Our skimming and scanning book develops skills on materials that students really use. For example, we have our students skim textbooks for pertinent information, not novels, which is a departure from some texts we have seen, and I might add, a sensible departure indeed.

2. We require attendance of students. We feel that if the student is to benefit from the many topics presented he needs to be present as much as possible. This often shocks freshmen students who often hear while in high school, that it doesn't matter whether you attend classes in college.

3. We hold individual conferences with each student two or three times a semester. This is a monumental task, especially if you have 165 students as I did last semester, but it pays dividends. At these conferences we get to know each other as human beings. We set goals together for the course and we check progress as the semester proceeds.

4. We expect success from our students from Day One. They are told they can do the job, and it is rewarding to see how positively they react to this approach. Too often students are told a course is too difficult for them or that

they can't succeed. We tell them they can succeed with effort.

More than one student has told me horror stories of how teachers they had began their classes. I remember one who said that on the first day of classes the teacher said, "I don't know what some of you dummies are doing in this class. You might as well sit in the back of the room and sleep." We believe,at LaCrosse, in the potential of every student.

5. We show concern for students. Our personal conferences set the tone for the semester. We try to make the students realize that we care about them as people. We learn their names as soon as we can and find out where they are from. Today's society is becoming more and more computerized. We are controlled by numbers and I.B.M. sheets. Students need someone to care. Don't we all?

6. We listen to students. How many teachers really listen to their students? How many people really listen to others?

I remember the story of the Illinois woman, who, convinced that most people at social gatherings don't listen, decided to test her theory.

Engaging in "small talk" at a party, she said cheerfully to another person, "By the way, just before leaving my house, I shot my husband."

"Oh, really?" came the reply. "How nice for you, dear."

Then there was the small child who said, "My father and I

had words this morning, but I didn't get to use mine."

A music therapist by the name of Deanna Edwards wrote a song about listening after visiting the room of an elderly man.

It's called "Who Will Listen?"

> It's been a long, long time since I've said
> what's on my mind.
> Doesn't anybody have time to spare?
> I have memories I wish that I could share.
> Is there someone who will listen to an old man,
> Though they've heard the words a hundred times
> before?
> All the stories I have told, like me, are
> growing old ...
> Doesn't anybody listen anymore?

I passed a former student of mine in a hallway the other day. I said, "Hi." She answered, "Good, how are you?"

We don't try to be amateur psychologists with our students, but we do listen.

7. Students are responsible for a number of assignments in our course. These assignments are carefully checked and graded. Punctuation, spelling, the whole bit are checked. After all, we are at a university level and to expect little or nothing of our students would soon turn the whole course into a farce. You have heard the expression "Mickey Mouse course." You don't want a course at any level to take on this connotation. So we demand assignments and expect them to be quality pieces of work.

In addition to this, students need to study for two vocabulary tests and an exam based on course lectures and handouts. These are more "teeth" added to our program to make the students realize that they can't make an A by simply

showing up every day.

8. We read to our students. This might sound ridiculous at first, but let's examine this point closer. Anyone who has been into reading much knows that the so-called experts advise reading to children. I read many things to my own children, I read to my pupils when I taught in elementary school, I read to my senior high students, I read to adults when I taught adult education, and I read to my college students in my present classes. Every semester I ask my students for feedback on the various things we did in class. Invariably the aspect of the class that is responded to most favorably by most students is the little time spent at the beginning of each class for a short reading. Now obviously you tailor your readings to your audience. I don't ordinarily read the things to my college students that I read to my elementary pupils. I usually select a passage that is relatively brief, it can be humorous, it can be serious, but more often than not it is related to mankind and his ways of coping with life. Students need and want to think more about life and what it's all about.

I believe it important to make the readings short, pertinent, and timely. It is crucial that the teacher prepare what he is going to read so that the reading is smooth and rhythmic. Let me share a few of the things I have read to my college students the last couple semesters.

The <u>first</u> is a simple poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson that goes ---

Finish each day and be done with it.
You have done what you could.
Some blunders and absurdities no doubt
crept in -- forget them as soon as you can.
Tomorrow is a new day;
begin it well and serenely, and
with too high a spirit to be
cumbered with your old nonsense.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

A second is a small piece from 1 Corinthians on "True Love".

If I have prophetic powers,
and understand all mysteries
and all knowledge,
and if I have all faith so as to
remove mountains,
but have not love,
I am nothing....
Love is patient and kind;
love is not jealous or boastful;
it is not arrogant or rude.
Love does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong,
but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
Love never ends .....

A third is an original poem created by yours truly that examines the pollution and ecology issues.

Garbage and Gunk

Garbage and gunk
Everywhere I look.
Paper covered parking lots,
Beer cans rusting in all their glory,
Broken glass piled in heaps,
Grimy gutters stuffed with litter.
Washrooms wallowing in filthy floors
and no towels
and no soap
and no mirror
and no stall doors,
But lots of gouging grafitti
and foul odors
and unflushed toilets
and locks that don't lock
and blowers that don't blow.
Garbage and gunk
Everywhere I look.

Overflowing garbage cans,
and gooey candy wrappers
and dying cigarette butts
and twisted pop top rings
and tangled plastic wraps.
Yet we cry about ecology,
And we cry about pollution,
And people don't even
wash their hands,
or flush the johns,
or use the ash trays
or wipe their noses.
Garbage and gunk
Everywhere I look.
There's a gum wad on your shoe,
urine odor in your nose.
There's hair in the sink,
and spit on the floor.
And still we pride ourselves
for our rockets
and our jets
our computers
and our stereos.
While we wallow in our sewage.
Garbage and gunk
Everywhere I look.

Or I might read a beautiful piece by Frank Capra, famed film director, who wrote about nature being the ultimate psychiatrist. His writing ends like this.

"This is nature, the psychiatrist, talking to you; cleansing your mind and body, replacing the cankers of fear, meanness, envy, and doubt with the purity, courage and joy of natural life; and saying to you: 'Be glad you're alive. Think clean and live with God.'"

Teachers should collect articles from newspapers and magazines, and highlight significant sayings from books. These can be shared with students. We do this at LaCrosse. No instructor should be afraid to take a few minutes at the beginning of class for this. Too many teachers begin lecturing the exact moment the second hand hits twelve.

Eventually students will bring things to share. I had one big, burly fellow come to me after class one day, pull out a crumpled paper from his wallet and hand it to me. "Read it," he said. "I always carry this with me. You can make a copy of it, if you wish." I DID!

Now, after all that I have said stating how our course is similar to other college courses and on the other hand different from so many, what if we still don't seem to be able to help students?

Then I share with them a piece from a marvelous study skills book entitled Your Study Skills or ... the Care and Feeding of Your Grade Point Average by Barbara Crist and Len Czarnecki, published by Shippensburg Collegiate Press.

The last page of their book is entitled "If All Else Fails," and says ---

> Bring the professor newspaper clippings dealing with his subject. Demonstrates fiery interest and gives him timely items to mention to the class.
>
> Look alert. Take notes eagerly. If you look at your watch, don't stare at it unbelievingly and shake it.
>
> Nod frequently and murmur. "How true!" To you, this seems exaggerated. To him it's quite objective.
>
> Sit in front, near him. (Applies only if you intend to stay awake). If you are going to all the trouble of making a good impression, you might as well let him know who you are, especially in a large class.
>
> Laugh at his jokes. You can tell. If he looks up from his notes and smiles expectantly, he has told a joke.
>
> Ask for outside reading. You don't have to read it, just ask.

If you must sleep, arrange to be called at the end of the hour. It creates an unfavorable impression if the rest of the class has left and you sit there alone, dozing.

Be sure the book you read during the lecture looks like a book from the course. If you do math in psychology class and psychology in math class, match the books for size and color.

Ask any questions you think he can answer. Conversely, avoid announcing that you have found the answer to a question he couldn't answer.

Call attention to his writing. Produces an exquisitely pleasant experience connected with you. If you know he's written a book or an article, ask in class if he wrote it.

But we have not failed at LaCrosse. Our informal student feedback tells us this, our high enrollment tells us we must be doing something right, and if more tangible evidence is needed, our standardized test scores back our successes.

After 7 semesters and 1473 students, we have compiled the following mean scores. Beginning speed in W.P.M. on easy reading material 205,71. End of semester speed on the same type material, 366,24 W.P.M. On college textbook type reading our beginning mean W.P.M. is 166.16 W.P.M. Our ending W.P.M. is 305.17 W.P.M. As far as over-all comprehension goes, our average beginning percentile is 39.93. Our end of the course over-all percentile is 60.14. The results have been too significant for chance alone to be the reason for our success.

In conclusion I recommend the following as far as reading courses for older students.

1. Concern should be shown for each and every student who takes the course. Students should realize that they are expected to succeed and even the instructors' facial expressions should reflect this.

2. Instructors need to listen to students and to become good empathizers, not amateur psychologists.

3. Reading should be shared with students.

4. Any college reading course should have substance to it along with some teeth. Students should have assignments to complete. They should have to demonstrate reasonable competence in order to receive a good grade.

5. The course should be as individualized as possible, each student working in the area of his own needs.

6. Regular college credit needs to be offered for the course. Until we restructure all levels of schooling and our life practices in general, students should receive regular college credit for reading courses. After all, if credit is given for golf techniques, personal health, and bowling, why not for reading?

So let's not pin our butterflies to paper. Let's allow them to fly freely, to sample the riches and beauties of life, to explore and learn, to question and accomplish, to live life to its fullest.

Let's teach reading in a positive fashion with a personal touch.